



States lift restrictions gradually amid fears of new variant

By DAVID EGGERT and DON BABWIN
Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — States are loosening their coronavirus restrictions on restaurants and other businesses because of improved infection and hospitalization numbers but are moving gradually and cautiously, in part because of the more contagious variant taking hold in the U.S. While the easing could cause case rates to rise, health experts say it can work if done in a measured way and if the public remains vigilant about masks and social distancing.

"If the frequency goes up, you tighten it up. If the frequency goes down, you loosen up. Getting it just right is almost impossible," said Dr. Arnold Monto, a public health professor at the University of Michigan. "There's no perfect way to do this."

As Michigan's coronavirus rate dropped to the nation's fifth-lowest over the last two weeks, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said bars and restaurants can welcome indoor customers next week for the first time in 2 1/2 months. But they will be under a 10 p.m. curfew and will be limited to 25% of capacity, or half of what was allowed the last time she loosened their restrictions, in June.

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Patrons enjoy lunch indoors Wednesday, Jan. 27, 2021, at Gibsons Italia restaurant in Chicago
Associated Press

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States lift restrictions gradually amid fears of new variant

Continued from Front

The state previously authorized the resumption of in-person classes at high schools and the partial reopening of movie theaters. "We're in a stronger position because we've taken this pause," Whitmer said. "But we are also very mindful of the fact that this variant is now here in Michigan. It poses a real threat." The COVID-19 death toll in the U.S. has climbed past 425,000, with the number of dead running at close to all-time highs at nearly 3,350 a day on average. But newly confirmed cases have dropped over the past two weeks from an average of about 248,000 per day to around 166,000. And the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 has fallen by tens of thousands to 109,000. At the same time, health experts have warned that the more contagious and possibly more lethal variant sweeping Britain will probably become the dominant source of infection in the U.S. by March. It has been



In this Jan. 25, 2021, file photo, Sara Nguyen, right, sits behind a plexiglass shield as she gives a manicure to Christine Frazer at KB Nails in Sacramento, Calif.

Associated Press

reported in over 20 states. Other mutant versions are circulating in South Africa and Brazil. The Brazil variant has been detected for the first time in the U.S., in Minnesota. Chicago and surrounding suburbs allowed indoor dining over the weekend for the first time since October.

Major cultural attractions including the Field Museum and Shedd Aquarium reopened with crowd limits. Steve Lombardo III, an owner of a Chicago-area restaurant group, called being able to seat customers indoors a "huge boost." One of its most famous restaurants, Gibsons Bar &

Steakhouse, has been using hospital-grade air filtration systems in the hopes of staying afloat, he said. "Will we be making money? Probably not," Lombardo said. "But we won't be hemorrhaging money like we have the last three months." Washington, D.C., also recently ended its month-long ban on indoor dining, but one in New York City remains in effect. California Gov. Gavin Newsom this week lifted stay-at-home orders he imposed

last month when hospitals were so overwhelmed with virus patients that they were on the verge of rationing lifesaving care. Restaurants and places of worship will be able to operate outdoors, and many stores will be able to have more shoppers inside. Jen Diaz, a 38-year-old technical writer from Santa Clarita, California, who works remotely and has not left her home since a trip to the supermarket in March, said she was "horrified" when she heard the governor's announcement. She has rheumatoid arthritis, and her treatments suppress her immune system, but she has yet to receive a vaccination because she is under 65.

"I was really, really proud of California's response at first" in the early months of the pandemic, she said. "Suddenly we're just opening everything. 'Let's go to the mall!'" She added: "The government doesn't seem to be taking this as seriously as it once did, on a state level." In Oregon, Gov. Kate Brown announced that some indoor operations such as gyms and movie theaters can reopen Friday with limited capacity. Indoor dining is still banned in the hardest-hit counties. □



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Census data for congressional seats still months away

By **MIKE SCHNEIDER**
Associated Press

The numbers used for divvying up U.S. congressional seats among the states won't be ready until the end of April, a Census Bureau official said Wednesday. The new goal for finishing data processing for the apportionment numbers is now April 30, said Kathleen Styles, a top bureau official. The deadline for turning in the apportionment numbers has been a moving target since the pandemic upended the Census Bureau's once-a-decade head count of every U.S. resident. The numbers were supposed to be turned in at

the end of last year, but the Census Bureau requested until the end of April after the virus outbreak caused the bureau to suspend operations. The deadline switched back to Dec. 31 after President Donald Trump issued a directive to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from the numbers used for divvying up congressional seats. President Joe Biden rescinded that order on his first day taking office last week. Government attorneys most recently had said that the numbers wouldn't be ready until early March because the Census Bureau needed to fix data irregularities. □

U.S. terrorism alert warns of politically motivated violence

By BEN FOX and
ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Homeland Security issued a national terrorism bulletin Wednesday warning of the potential for lingering violence from people motivated by anti-government sentiment after President Joe Biden's election, suggesting the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol may embolden extremists and set the stage for additional attacks.

The department did not cite a specific threat, but pointed to "a heightened threat environment across the United States" that it believes "will persist" for weeks after Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration.

It is not uncommon for the federal government to warn local law enforcement through bulletins about the prospect for violence tied to a particular date or event, such as July 4. But this particular bulletin, issued through the the department's National Terrorism Advisory System, is notable because it effectively places the Biden administration into the politically charged debate over how to describe or characterize acts motivated by political ideology and suggests that it sees violence aimed at



In this Jan. 6, 2021, file photo rioters try to break through a police barrier at the Capitol in Washington. Associated Press

overturning the election as akin to terrorism.

The wording of the document suggests that national security officials see a connective thread between recent violence over the last year motivated by anti-government grievances, whether over COVID-19 restrictions, the 2020 election results and police use of force. It also singles out racially motivated acts of violence such as the 2019 rampage targeting Hispanics in Texas, as well as the threat posed by extremists motivated by foreign terrorist organizations.

"Information suggests that some ideologically-motivated violent extremists with objections to the exercise of governmental authority and the presidential transition, as well as other perceived grievances fueled by false narratives, could continue to mobilize to incite or commit violence," the bulletin said. It did not mention any ideological or political affiliation. A DHS statement noted the potential for violence from "a broad range of ideologically-motivated actors."

The alert comes at a tense

time after the riot at the Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump who were seeking to overturn the presidential election. DHS also noted violent riots in "recent days," an apparent reference to events in Portland, Oregon, linked to anarchist groups. "The domestic terrorism attack on our Capitol earlier this month shined a light on a threat that has been right in front of our faces for years," said Rep. Bennie Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat who is chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee.

"I am glad to see that DHS fully recognizes the threat posed by violent, right-wing extremists and is taking efforts to communicate that threat to the American people." The alert was issued by acting Homeland Security Secretary David Pekoske. Biden's nominee for the Cabinet post, Alejandro Mayorkas, has not been confirmed by the Senate. Two former homeland security secretaries, Michael Chertoff and Janet Napolitano, called on the Senate to confirm Mayorkas so he can start working with the FBI and other agencies and deal with the threat posed by domestic extremists, among other issues. Chertoff, who served under President George W. Bush, said in a conference call with reporters that attacks by far-right, domestic extremists are not new but that deaths attributed to them in recent years in the U.S. have exceeded those linked to jihadists such as al-Qaida. "We have to be candid and face what the real risk is," he said.

Federal authorities have charged more than 150 people in the Capitol siege, including some with links to right-wing extremist groups such as the Three Percenters and the Oath Keepers. □

Bernie Sanders' mittens, memes help raise \$1.8M for charity

By LISA RATHKE
Associated Press

About those woolly mittens that U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders wore to the presidential inauguration, sparking endless quirky memes across social media? They've helped to raise \$1.8 million in the last five days for charitable organizations in Sanders' home state of Vermont, the independent senator announced Wednesday. The sum comes from the sale of merchandise with the Jan. 20 image of him sitting with his arms and legs crossed, clad in his brown parka and recycled wool mittens.

Sanders put the first of

the so-called "Chairman Sanders" merchandise, including T-shirts, sweatshirts and stickers, on his website Thursday night and the first run sold out in less than 30 minutes, he said. More merchandise was added over the weekend and sold out by Monday morning, he said.

"Jane and I were amazed by all the creativity shown by so many people over the last week, and we're glad we can use my internet fame to help Vermonters in need," Sanders said in a written statement. "But even this amount of money is no substitute for action by Congress, and I will be doing everything

I can in Washington to make sure working people in Vermont and across the country get the relief they need in the middle of the worst crisis we've faced since the Great Depression." Sanders' mittens were made by Jen Ellis, a Vermont elementary school teacher who has a side business making mittens out of recycled wool. His inauguration look, also featuring the winter jacket made by Burton Snowboards, sparked countless memes from the photo taken by Agence France-Presse: The former presidential candidate could be found on social media timelines taking a seat on



Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders arrives for the 59th Presidential Inauguration at the U.S. Capitol for President-elect Joe Biden in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021.

Associated Press

the subway, the moon and the couch with the cast of "Friends," among other creative locales. Ellis said on social media over the weekend that Sanders called to tell her that "the mitten frenzy

had raised an enormous amount of money for Vermont charities although she was not authorized to disclose the amount, yet. "But it's BIG and it's amazing! Thank you!! Generosity brings joy," she tweeted. □

Man pleads guilty in conspiracy to kidnap Michigan governor

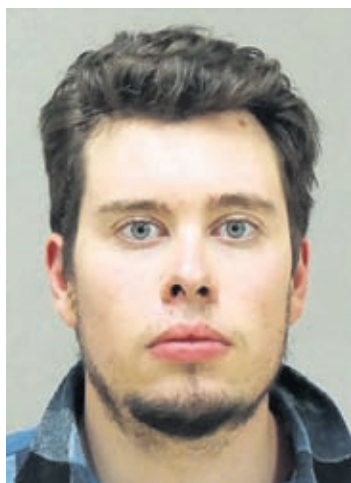
By **ED WHITE**

Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — One of six men charged in an alleged plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer pleaded guilty Wednesday to conspiracy, admitting that the group discussed an incredible scheme to snatch her at her lakeside vacation home and destroy a bridge to slow down police.

Ty Garbin's guilty plea is a major catch for prosecutors, only about four months after arrests were made. His testimony could strengthen the government's case against the others and back up evidence collected by informants and undercover agents.

Garbin appeared in federal court in Grand Rapids a few hours after a plea agreement loaded with details about the operation was filed, including his pledge to fully cooperate



In a photo provided by the Kent County Sheriff, Ty Garbin is shown in a booking photo.

Associated Press

with investigators. There was no agreement on a sentencing range, but his assistance could help him when he returns July 8.

The FBI in October said it broke up a plot to kidnap Whitmer, a Democrat, by anti-government extremists upset over coronavirus restrictions she had imposed in Michigan. Six people

were charged in federal court while eight others were charged in state court with aiding them.

U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker went through a series of questions about Garbin's rights and his willingness to plead guilty. When the judge asked if he had second thoughts, Garbin replied: "I do not, your honor."

In the plea agreement, Garbin, 25, of Hartland, acknowledged more than six pages of stunning allegations. He said he and others trained with weapons in Munith, Michigan, and Cambria, Wisconsin, last summer and "discussed the plan to storm the Capitol and kidnap the governor." The plot, he said, eventually switched to Whitmer's second home in Antrim County.

Garbin said he "advocated waiting until after the national election, when

the conspirators expected widespread civil unrest to make it easier for them to operate."

In September, the six men trained at Garbin's property near Luther, Michigan, constructing a "shoot house" to resemble Whitmer's vacation home and "assaulting it with firearms," the plea deal states.

The men also made trips to Antrim County to study the home and the area, Garbin said.

Garbin said he sent a text message to someone who turned out to be a government informant, indicating that "if the bridge goes down it will stop the wave," a suggestion that police would be delayed in responding to a kidnapping if a nearby bridge was blown up.

He said he also offered to paint his boat black for another night of surveillance. Last fall, defense attorney

Mark Satawa said Garbin had no intention to carry out a kidnapping, no matter what he might have said in recorded or online conversations. But outside court Wednesday, he said Garbin believed a guilty plea was the "right thing to do."

"This is about our client saying, 'Look, I need to own up to what I did. It was wrong. I'm accepting responsibility. I'm sorry for having done it,'" Satawa told reporters.

The other defendants are Adam Fox, Barry Croft Jr., Kaleb Franks, Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta. A trial has been scheduled for March 23.

"I'm sure his fellow codefendants are extremely nervous about this and may also rethink their legal strategies as a result," said Javed Ali, a counterterrorism expert and visiting instructor at the University of Michigan. □

Oklahoma seeking to return \$2M worth of hydroxychloroquine

By **SEAN MURPHY**

The Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The Oklahoma attorney general's office is attempting to return \$2 million worth of a malaria drug once touted by former President Donald Trump as an effective treatment for COVID-19, a spokesman said Wednesday.

Alex Gerszewski, a spokesman for Attorney General Mike Hunter, said Hunter is attempting to negotiate a return of the 1.2 million hydroxychloroquine pills Oklahoma acquired in April from a California-based supplier, FFF Enterprises. He said the office was acting on a request from the Oklahoma State Department of Health, which authorized the purchase.

A spokeswoman for FFF Enterprises didn't immediately return a message Wednesday seeking comment.

The attempt by Oklahoma to return the hydroxychloroquine was first reported by the online news publication The Frontier.

Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt defended the purchase



In this Feb. 21, 2017, file photo, Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter sits at a meeting in Oklahoma City.

last year, saying the drug was showing some promise as a treatment in early March and he didn't want to miss an opportunity to acquire it.

"I was being proactive to try and protect Oklaho-

mans," Stitt said at the time. The drug has since been shown to have little or no effect on severe cases of COVID-19, and a former state health official chalked up Oklahoma's purchase to something that happens

Associated Press

in "the fog of war." While governments in at least 20 other states obtained more than 30 million doses of the drug through donations from the federal reserve or private companies, Oklahoma and Utah

bought them from private pharmaceutical companies. Then-Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, a Republican, initially defended the state's \$800,000 purchase of 20,000 packets of hydroxychloroquine compounded with zinc, but later canceled an additional plan to spend \$8 million more to buy 200,000 more treatments. The state then managed to secure a refund on the \$800,000 no-bid contract it signed with a local pharmacy company that had been promoting the drugs.

The CEO of the pharmacy company has since pleaded guilty to a federal misdemeanor for mislabeling the drug imported from China. Dan Richards, the operator of Meds In Motion, acknowledged receiving large amounts of the drug from an unregistered manufacturer in China incorrectly labeled as an herbal supplement.

His lawyer has said he trying to help procure as much of the product as possible because at the time it seemed like a promising treatment for the coronavirus. □

Cyber cops team up to disrupt top malware-seeding network

By **MIKE CORDER** and
FRANK BAJAK

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands
(AP) — European and North

American cyber cops have joined forces to disrupt what may be the world's largest network for seeding malware infections, striking a major blow against criminal gangs that have been using it for years to install ransomware in extortion schemes, steal data and engage in financial theft.

European Union police and the judicial agencies Europol and Eurojust said Wednesday that investigators took control of the infrastructure behind the botnet known as Emotet.

A botnet is a network of hijacked computers, and this one has effectively served as a primary door-opener for cybercriminals since 2014. "This is a really big deal. Emotet was one of the largest, if not the largest, botnets delivering a wide variety of malware. Their botnet consisted of hundreds of thousands compromised hosts which were used to send more than 10 million spam and phishing emails a week," said Allan Liska, an analyst with Recorded Future.

The Emotet model of re-



In this file photo dated Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018, the Europol headquarters building in The Hague, Netherlands.

cent years was "a game changer for ransomware gangs who otherwise rely on other access methods," said Jake Williams, president of Rendition Infosec, another cybersecurity firm. Emotet has allowed ransomware gangs to outsource initial access, and focus their efforts instead on a cybercrime variety that has crippled Western government, healthcare and educational networks by scrambling their data

and only providing a decoding software key after they have paid up. Those who don't risk having data exfiltrated by the hackers exposed publicly.

Williams said via text message that although someone will eventually fill the gap "there's no question that this will hurt (ransomware gangs) and help defenders in the short/mid term."

Authorities in the Netherlands, Germany, the United

States, the U.K., France, Lithuania, Canada and Ukraine took part in the international operation coordinated by the two Hague-based agencies.

Dutch prosecutors said the malware, run out of eastern Europe by a Russian-speaking organization, was first discovered in 2014 and "evolved into the go-to solution for cybercriminals over the years," responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars in losses beginning

with financial theft through a banking trojan.

They said two of the main servers for the infrastructure were based in the Netherlands and a third in another undisclosed country.

The Emotet botnet was effectively used to manage infections of victims and provide a distributed bulwark against takedown attempts by authorities. In the disruption by law enforcement, its command-and-control infrastructure was routed to servers controlled by law enforcement, cutting off criminal tenants of Emotet from quarry they have infected.

"The infected machines of victims have been re-directed towards this law enforcement-controlled infrastructure," the agency said.

"This is a unique and new approach to effectively disrupt the activities of the facilitators of cybercrime."

The operation recalled one carried out by Microsoft late last year against a different botnet known as Trickbot — which was pushed out using Emotet and used in ransomware attacks. The U.S. National Security Agency was also reported to have tried to take down Trickbot. □

Associated Press

Philippines protests new China law as 'verbal threat of war'

By **JIM GOMEZ**

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP)

— The Philippines has protested a new Chinese law that authorizes its coast

guard to fire on foreign vessels and destroy other countries' structures on islands it claims, Manila's top diplomat said Wednesday.



In this July 22, 2019, file photo, protesters display a balloon with an anti-China message during a rally near the Philippine Congress in Manila, Philippines.

Associated Press

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said in a tweet that the new Chinese law "is a verbal threat of war to any country that defies" it. Failure to challenge the law "is submission to it," he said. "While enacting law is a sovereign prerogative, this one — given the area involved, or for that matter the open South China Sea — is a verbal threat of war to any country that defies the law," Locsin said.

China's Coast Guard Law, which was passed on Friday, empowers the force to "take all necessary measures, including the use of weapons, when national sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction are being illegally infringed upon by foreign organiza-

tions or individuals at sea." The law also authorizes the coast guard to demolish other countries' structures built on reefs and islands claimed by China and to seize or order foreign vessels illegally entering China's territorial waters to leave.

The Chinese law raises the stakes and the possibility of clashes with regional maritime rivals.

The Philippine protest is the latest strongly worded public criticism by Manila of China's increasingly assertive actions in the disputed waters, despite cozier ties nurtured by President Rodrigo Duterte with Beijing. Last July, Locsin warned China of "the severest response" if military

exercises being staged by China's People's Liberation Army in the South China Sea spilled over into Philippine territory.

China and the Philippines, along with Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei, have been locked in territorial rivalries in the South China Sea in tense decades-long standoffs. Indonesian forces also have had confrontations with the Chinese coast guard and fishing flotillas in what Indonesian officials say are their territorial waters near the South China Sea.

The United States has no claims in the strategic waterway but its naval forces have challenged China's territorial claims over virtually the entire sea. □

Report: Israeli settler population surged during Trump era

By **JOSEPH KRAUSS**

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's West Bank settler population has grown at a far higher rate than the country as a whole over the last four years, a pro-settler group said Wednesday, a period that coincides with the Trump administration's unprecedented acceptance of settlement activity. The report by West Bank Jewish Population Stats shows the settler population growing by around 13% since the start of 2017 to reach 475,481. During the same period, Israel's population grew by around 8% to reach nearly 9.3 million, according to the government.

Baruch Gordon, the director of West Bank Jewish Population Stats, downplayed the influence of U.S. policy, saying the annual growth rate actually declined in recent years even before the coronavirus pandemic. The West Bank settler population grew by 2.62% in 2020, according to his figures, compared to 1.7% in Israel as a whole. In 2016, the settler population grew 3.59%.

"I don't think any American president can influence that much, because growth on the ground is (dependent on) internal Is-



This June 30, 2020 file photo, shows the West Bank Jewish settlement of Ma'ale Efrayim in the Jordan Valley.

raeli government decisions on how much construction to do and not to do," he said.

Many settlers are religious Jews who tend to have larger families, driving population growth, and many Israelis are drawn to the settlements because they offer more affordable housing.

Gordon expects growth to continue even if President Joe Biden pressures Israel to rein it in. "The facts on the ground are stronger than any American foreign poli-

cy," he said.

Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem in the 1967 war, and the Palestinians want both as part of their future state. The Palestinians and much of the international community view the settlements as illegal and as an obstacle to creating a viable, contiguous Palestinian state.

The settlers and their supporters view the West Bank as the biblical and historical heartland of the Jewish people and are opposed to any partition.

Former President Donald Trump's administration abandoned decades of U.S. policy by accepting the settlements and released a Mideast plan in which Israel would have been able to keep all of them, including smaller settlements deep inside the occupied territory. Last year, Mike Pompeo became the first U.S. secretary of state to visit a settlement.

The Palestinians angrily rejected the plan, and Biden is likely to abandon it. He is opposed to settlement ex-

pansion and has said he hopes to revive peace negotiations.

By not objecting to new settlement construction — as his predecessors from both parties had done — Trump encouraged their growth, further complicating efforts to bring about a two-state solution, which is still widely seen internationally as the only way to resolve the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli authorities advanced plans to build nearly 800 homes in West Bank settlements just days before Trump left office. Peace Now, an Israeli anti-settlement watchdog, says Israel approved or advanced construction of over 12,000 settlement homes in 2020, the highest number in a single year since it began recording statistics in 2012. Israel is also pressing ahead with massive infrastructure projects that will more closely link the settlements to its major cities and set the stage for future growth. Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, blamed the growth of settlements on "the previous U.S. administration and the current Israeli government," reiterating that they are "illegal according to international law." □

Associated Press

Iran, Taliban officials say U.S. pushing war in Afghanistan

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranian and Taliban officials met in Tehran on Wednesday and accused the U.S. of provoking the continuation of war in Afghanistan, Iranian State TV reported. Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, told visiting Taliban political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar that the U.S. seeks to continue the war in neighboring Afghanistan.

"The U.S. strategy supports the continuation of war and bloodshed among various Afghan groups in the political spectrum," Shamkhani was quoted as saying. He said the U.S. tries to blame insecurity

and instability in the country on individual Afghan groups.

There was no immediate comment from the U.S., which signed a peace agreement with the Taliban last February and met its goal this month of reducing the number of troops in Afghanistan to about 2,500.

Taliban representatives and the Afghan government earlier this month resumed peace talks in Qatar, the Gulf Arab state where the insurgents maintain an office. The stop-and-go talks are aimed at ending decades of conflict.

But frustration and fear

have grown over a recent spike in violence, and both sides blame one another. Baradar, who arrived Monday with a Taliban delegation, criticized the U.S. for allegedly breaking its commitments to the February deal. He did not elaborate.

"We do not trust the U.S. and will fight any group that is a mercenary for the U.S.," he said.

Occasionally, Iranian and Taliban officials meet for what Tehran says are talks aimed at helping facilitate intra-Afghan dialogue.

Iran sees the presence of U.S. forces in neighboring Afghanistan and Iraq as a threat on its doorstep and



In this Jan. 31, 2020 file photo, Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, center, top U.S. commander for the Middle East, makes an unannounced visit in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Associated Press

routinely calls for their departure. Iran and Afghanistan have

some 945 kilometers (some 585 miles) of common border. □

Rubbish-covered lake brings to light Balkans waste problem

By DARKO VOJINOVIC

Associated Press

PRIBOJ, Serbia (AP)—Trucks and building machines are parked on a river dam in southwest Serbia but not for construction work. Instead, huge cranes are being used to clear tons of garbage crammed at the foot of the power plant. Serbia and other Balkan nations are overwhelmed by communal waste after decades of neglect and lack of efficient waste-management policies in the countries aspiring to join the European Union. Burning rubbish dumps can be seen from the roads, plastic bags are hanging from trees and islands of waste are floating down the region's rivers. The problem usually comes into focus in winter, when swollen waters sweep over landfills, pushing the garbage toward hydropower dams.



A boat pushes tons of garbage stuck at the foot of the hydro power plant at the Potpecko accumulation lake near Priboj, in southwest Serbia, Friday, Jan. 22, 2021.

Associated Press

This has been the case at the Potpec accumulation lake near the power plant after a spate of rainy and snowy weather in Decem-

ber and early January. The surface of the lake got covered in a thick layer of waste ranging from plastics to rusty metal scraps, tree

trunks and even reportedly a coffin.

"Based on a recent study, we found out that in these towns, in the five munici-

palities in Montenegro and three in Serbia, about 45,000 tons of waste are collected (per year)," said Predrag Saponjic, the Lim River hydropower plant system manager. Looking at the rubbish-strewn lake, he added that "even if only a fraction of that waste ends up in the Lim River, we get this." Bosnia too has reported a garbage pileup that endangers the hydroelectric dam on the Drina River, near the eastern town of Visegrad. The Lim is one of the tributaries of the Drina, which makes their waterways — and garbage flows — closely connected.

The two emerald-colored rivers — the Drina flows along the border between Serbia and Bosnia — during summer are favored by adventurers and water rafters who enjoy the winding waterways and seemingly pristine nature. □

Maduro's 'miracle' treatment for COVID-19 draws skeptics

By SCOTT SMITH and

JORGE RUEDA

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro appears to be counting on yet another "miracle" to save his citizens from COVID-19, promoting a secretive solution with no published scientific evidence he claims will conquer the new coronavirus.

"Ten drops under the tongue every four hours and the miracle is done," Maduro said in a televised appearance on Sunday.

"It's a powerful antiviral, very powerful, that neutralizes the coronavirus." But his government has released no evidence. He even kept secret the name of the "brilliant Venezuelan mind" behind it, saying he needed to protect them. Scientists at home and abroad remained skeptical. The local National Academy of Medicine said it appeared to be derived from the common herb thyme.

It's not the first time the Venezuelan leader has promoted a cure. In Oc-

tober, he notified the Pan American Health Organization that Venezuelan scientists discovered a molecule that nullifies the replication capacity of the new coronavirus. He hasn't spoken of that development since. He's also promoted a special herbal tea he claims can fend off the virus and other ailments.

Other leaders too have embraced solutions dismissed by scientific studies. Former U.S. President Donald Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro both stubbornly touted an antimalarial drug despite repeated studies finding it ineffective and possibly dangerous.

The new coronavirus hasn't hit Venezuela as hard as other South American countries such as Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, though many experts say that's likely because sanctions against Maduro's government have sharply limited travel there.

Maduro said the treatment, which he called carvativir, has been under testing for nine months among Venezuelans ill with the coronavirus. He said he plans to distribute it nationwide and

to other nations as well.

Dr. David Boulware, professor of medicine and an infectious diseases physi-

cian at the University of Minnesota Medical School, noted the lack of scientific evidence. □



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro speaks during a ceremony marking the start of the judicial year at the Supreme Court in Caracas, Venezuela, Friday, Jan. 22, 2021.

Associated Press

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LOCAL



Alberto Perret-Gentil, Vice-president of operations

EAGLE BEACH — Azure Beach Residences speaks for itself the moment you set foot on the place. The luxurious real estate has all ingredients to offer you a 5-star-de-luxe plate. Located right on the beach, offering a blend between your own condominium with advantages and experience of a hotel and all amenities that belong to a spot in heaven.

Amazing Azure



Aruba Today was delighted to talk to a wonderful couple from New York, Esteban Marquez and his wife who are proud owner of one of the condos.

"We love the condo we have purchased at Azure. We are planning on retirement five years from now, we are from New York. This is excellent, we are very happy with our choice and we love the island." Happy owners on a happy island, it sounds like music to his ears says Alberto Perret-Gentil, Executive Vice-president of Operations at Azure Beach Residences.

"In August we had the grand opening of Tower II of Azure Beach Residences. We see that there is a new trend of people wanting to work from their second home, their vacation condo. Our island is blessed with the perfect beaches and climate, it is very safe and –many do not know this–

it has the best internet in the Caribbean." During the COVID-19 crisis Pering Group, also the developer of Harbour House Aruba, stays connected to their market and is able to capture all those people staying home at this time. "We continuously show our new projects and new financial ideas. We are very optimistic. This is going to be the best semester in sales in our 20 years on Aruba," Perret-Gentil states.

Tower 1 of Azure Beach Residences has 45 units on the northern and southern corner and is practically sold out. The residence offers two units at the upper level of the Clubhouse which has on the ground level the restaurant and the lobby and on the upper level the gym, area for grill and a pool table. Tower 2 offers 60 units with studios, 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, 3-bedroom units and 3- bedroom penthouses at the 8th floor. For more information you can visit the website www.azure-aruba.com. Harbour House Aruba is another project of this group offering 94 condominiums in Oranjestad, just in front of the Renaissance Mall.



More information can be found at: www.harbourhousearuba.com.

Testing tourists on the return to the USA, post vacation. It's easy!

ORANJESTAD —Aruba's tourism authorities find it important to explain your options for post vacation testing when on Aruba. In accordance with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Government of the United States of America it is required that all returning travelers present a negative COVID-19 test result prior boarding. This is effective as of January 26, 2021.

In the Aruban Government's continuing efforts to provide the safest, seamless and coordinated travel experience possible, the Aruba Tourism Authority would like to inform you that all necessary facilities and procedures are in place for any visitor needing to take a PCR test while in Aruba as a requirement for re-entry to their country/state of origin.

Aruba has a modern infrastructure, state-of-the-art hospital and well-equipped medical facilities. Three (3) certified laboratories in Aruba will offer the PCR testing service to outbound travelers. The facilities have ample test kits available and testing is priced between \$75 and \$126. Visitors will find appointments easy to book and the turnaround time for test results is within 24 hours. Between the facilities, visitors will have the option to make an appointment, walk in, or have the test done at their place of stay. It is also very important to note that the Aruba Visitors Insurance will cover all costs related to a positive Covid-19 results based on this requirement such as quarantine, isolation and trans-

portation. Cost. The insurance however does not cover the test upon this new requirement. These are the 3 certified labs where you can conduct your test:

- MedLab: www.covidaruba.com – Phone (+297) 586-1600 – Cell/WhatsApp (+297) 597-5544

1. Testing is available at visitors accommodation (hotel/ home). Appointment recommended for this service. This service will be free of charge if booked online in advance on www.covidaruba.com. An extra fee will be applied if the appointment is made on the same day
2. Walk-in service accepted at our physical location – No appointment necessary
Price for the test is \$126. Conduct the test before 11am for same day results.

- MedCare and Laboratorio di Servizio are formally approved to do both antigen and PCR testing. They will be doing this at several of the larger branded hotels/resorts. Most hotels/resorts made similar arrangement, tourists/incoming passengers should know that they have options when on island.

General information:

MedCare Clinic is a high-quality, high-service medical clinic specialized in care for tourists with testing locations conveniently located at several of the major brand hotels. They are open seven days a week; please check open-

ing times with your hotel. They collaborate with Laboratorio di Servizio which is an ISO-15189:2012 medical laboratory fully accredited by the Dutch Council for Accreditation (M317) and they guarantee reliable test results within 24 hours.

For departure testing MedCare Clinic/Laboratorio di Servizio offer Antigen and PCR testing:

1. High service testing location at your hotel:
Antigen testing US\$50
PCR test US\$125
An In-room (high privacy) service is also possible at an extra charge.
2. Drive thru and walk in facility at their location at The Mill (J.E. Irausquin Blvd 330, Noord), at the Courtyard by Marriott
Antigen test US\$50
PCR Test US\$125

For special group arrangements or appointments please mail to info@medcare.aw or call +297 280 0630.

- Lab at Horacio Oduber Hospital: (US\$ 75) <https://www.arubahospital.com/> – service-center@hoharuba.com – (+297) 597-4522 (Call or WhatsApp).

For more information go to www.aruba.com and click under the health requirements section. □

Aruba to me.....



ORANJESTAD — You are back and we love to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island. Jill, Larry, Carolee and Chuck did so and we feel happy to share their love for Aruba with you.

"Aruba to me is...an exuberating feeling of happiness reoccurring every day; making memories with longtime friends; and of course, excellent food!"
Jill & Larry Lincoln; Carolee and Chuck Kunz from Hockessin, Delaware □





ORANJESTAD — “The philosophy is to get more out of life and live in a great environment that is also sustainable,” says Randolph Arends from Aruba Living Today. The property mediator is referring to their newest offering: Commandeurs Ponton Apartments. Construction of the complex has already started and Arends is happy to present to us the first buyers from the Netherlands. Why did they choose for Commandeurs?



First buyers of new Commandeurs Ponton Apartments a fact: Intentional living that focuses on what you believe matters

“The perfect location, the environmental friendliness of the project with solar panels, the community feeling which is especially important when you have a certain age made us decide for Commandeurs. The prospect clearly states that this is the best purchase for starters and people who retire and we cannot agree more on that. On top of that we will be able to enjoy Aruba's famous sunsets,” says the owner. They looked for an affordable and small apartment, though very comfortable and convenient and they found it. “We are beyond happy.”

The modern designed project shines with happy, bright colors and offers affordable 2-bedroom, 1-bathroom apartments built with high quality European materials. Ocean view, centrally located, a community pool and great value for money. On September 14th 2020, construction started of the first of three buildings. “Now we started the first building with eight 72 m2 (775 sq. ft.) apartments and eight 54 m2 (581 sq. ft.) apartments. Pre-construction prices start at \$ 152,000, but in the course of the building will increase. So get it while you can,” Arends hints.

Unique on the island: Home care offering & permit handling

Arends: “What we see is that Aruba is very popular with the older generation, the pensionaries. Reasons are the stable warm climate, the quiet and long-stretched white-sandy beaches, the location outside of the hurricane belt, the safety of the island, the political stability, the high quality infrastructure and our friendly people. And let us not forget the high quality health care, founded on the system of the Netherlands.” Aruba Living Today noticed that this type of buyer also requires assistance in several areas and they decided to take it all out of hands and offer more than the average realtor. “We are unique in this because we have our own certified Dutch nurse (multilingual) available for our home owners meaning there is a 24/7 home care for you standby. The interior design of our apartments will be as convenient as possible and wheelchair friendly with stable doors and wider entrance. We will be offering different packages of home care

support and retirement permits. We are evaluating a shuttle service to take people to town and to the beach. Yes, we are here to release you of any hassle and give you back happiness and peace in mind!”

Details that matter

The development is close to the new Waty Vos Boulevard putting you within five minutes to Eagle Beach (voted as one of the best beaches in the world), the supermarkets and the downtown area. The building will have central air conditioning and the staircase or elevator will take you up to the higher floors which provide a spectacular view to the Caribbean Sea. By owning one of the apartments, you will automatically be a part of the owner's association which together will take care of the community grounds, pool, elevators and solar panels (on the roof and parking lot) to lower the costs of electricity. Arends: “Not too expensive, not too big. A good size apartment for those who strive to live comfortable yet still have the financial space to travel and do other things in life.” A happy, low-stress life provides the space to figure out what matters most and the freedom to focus on these things. Instead of spending your weekends on home maintenance projects or mowing a yard, you can go to the beach and the pool. You can relax more and even nap more (yes!) without thinking about things that need done around the house. Commandeur Ponton Apartments is all about intentional living, a concept that suits Aruba Living Today completely. Arends: “My goal was to do real estate in a different way when I established this company June 1st 2009. Not from the perspective of only selling, but to look for the perfect match between dream house and client. My philosophy is: it will only work when all involved are happy and connected by that personal touch.”

Aruba Living Today

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Debate heats up over how countries tax Big Tech companies

By **DAVID McHUGH**

AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)

— An international debate over how countries tax big U.S. technology companies such as Google, Amazon and Facebook is heating up, presenting a challenge for President Joe Biden's new administration.

A mid-year deadline is on the horizon for talks about a global deal to defuse trade disputes with France and other countries that are imposing go-it-alone digital taxes that the United States views as discriminatory.

France imposed a 3% tax on digital revenue for large tech companies, in effect singling out the U.S. tech giants. The French government has said it would withdraw the tax in favor of an international solution being negotiated under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a Paris-based international organization of 37 advanced economies.

Experts and officials say time is getting short. Manal Corwin, a tax principal at professional services firm KPMG and a former Treasury Department official in the Obama administration, said digital taxes multiplying outside the OECD pro-

cess "are threatening to trigger a trade war."

U.S. trade officials have called unilateral digital taxes unfair and threatened trade retaliation against French goods, but have held off imposing sanctions. Finance officials from more than 130 countries convened online Wednesday to resume negotiations over how best to make sure multinational companies don't avoid taxation by shifting their activities and profits among countries. One key question is how to appropriately tax companies such as tech firms that may have no on-the-ground presence in a country but nonetheless do substantial digital business there in the form of online advertising, the sale of user data, search engines, or social media platforms.

The talks are about how to allocate part of a company's revenue to the country where its services are used so the government there can benefit from the taxes. The two-day meeting is to assess where things stand and no final decision is expected. OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría said in an opening speech that it was crucial to reach a deal by mid-2021.

"The importance of reaching an agreement is in-



This photo combo of images shows the Amazon, Google and Facebook logos.

Associated Press

creasing by the day," Gurría said. Over 40 countries are considering or planning unilateral digital taxes, and if they impose them, "there will be this retaliation, we will turn a tax tension into a trade tension, maybe into a trade war...when we need the opposite," he said.

The coronavirus pandemic has only put a sharper edge on the issue of digital taxation. The pandemic has accelerated digitalization through remote work and contactless activities, and in some cases led to strong profits for digital companies; meanwhile, government budgets are

strained by added spending and less tax revenue.

Said KPMG's Corwin: "A lot of the countries have said, 'We're holding for the OECD to get to an agreement,' but the combination of the politics on the ground of wanting to impose these taxes, as well as the fiscal demands of the financial fallout of the pandemic, is increasing the pressure for governments to act."

Most participants want an international agreement rather than runaway unilateral measures, she said, "but the politics and the fiscal demands are creating an inability to wait much longer than June."

There is no agreement in several key areas. One open question is whether technology companies should be singled out, since digital technologies are spreading throughout the economy? Under U.S. pressure, the talks expanded to potentially include other kinds of consumer-facing businesses that also reap profits across borders, such as luxury brands.

Barbara Angus, global tax policy leader for professional services firm EY, said the question of exactly whom the new digital tax applies to was "the single biggest political issue to be

resolved" in the talks.

"If you bring in other consumer-facing businesses, the U.S. as a big market would gain taxing revenue from some of those foreign consumer-facing businesses that serve the U.S. market while potentially losing some tax rights over U.S.-headquartered digital businesses," she said.

Karan Bhatia, Google's vice president for government affairs and public policy, said in a blog post that the need to update the international tax system "isn't limited to the technology sector. Almost all multinational companies use data, computers and internet connectivity to power their products and services."

Bhatia said Google "strongly supported" the OECD's work and opposed "discriminatory unilateral taxes."

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg has said the company wants the OECD process to succeed "so that we have a stable and reliable system going forward." Amazon said in a statement that "we continue to strongly and consistently support and contribute to the OECD's work" and called for a broad international agreement that would limit "distortive unilateral measures." □

Walmart to build more robot-filled warehouses at stores

By **JOSEPH PISANI**

AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Walmart is enlisting the help of ro-

bots to keep up with a surge in online orders.

The company said Wednesday that it plans

to build warehouses at its stores where self-driving robots will fetch groceries and have them ready for shoppers to pick up in an hour or less.

Walmart declined to say how many of the warehouses it will build, but construction has started at stores in Lewisville, Texas; Plano, Texas; American Fork, Utah; and Bentonville, Arkansas, where Walmart's corporate offices are based. A test site was opened more than a year ago at a store in Salem, New Hampshire.

Walmart hopes the warehouses will speed up curbside pickups, where orders

are brought outside to shoppers' cars. The option, along with deliveries, became increasingly popular as virus-weary shoppers avoid going inside stores. At the start of the pandemic last year, Walmart said delivery and pickup sales grew 300%.

The company said the robots won't roam store aisles. Instead, they'll stay inside warehouses built in separate areas, either within a store or next to it. Windows will be placed at some locations so shoppers can watch the robots work.

The wheeled robots carry crates of apple juice, ce-

real and other small goods to Walmart workers, who then bag them for shoppers. Rival Amazon uses similar technology in its warehouses, with robots bringing books, vitamins and other small items to workers to box and ship.

Walmart said the robots save time since employees don't have to walk store aisles to find items. Workers will, however, have to go into the store to pick out fresh groceries, such as meat, fish and vegetables. They'll also have to grab TVs, vacuum cleaners and other large items that are too large for the robots to carry. □



In this Tuesday, Aug. 4, 2020, file photo, signage is pictured at a Walmart store in Oklahoma City.

Associated Press

Empty seas: Oceanic shark populations dropped 71% since 1970

By **CHRISTINA LARSON**

AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP)—

When marine biologist Stuart Sandin talks about sharks, it sounds like he's describing Jedi of the ocean. "They are terrific predators, fast swimmers and they have amazing senses — they can detect any disturbance in the ocean from great distance," such as smells or tiny changes in water currents. Their ability to quickly sense anything outside the norm in their environment helps them find prey in the vastness of the open ocean. But it also makes them especially vulnerable in the face of increased international fishing pressure, as global fishing fleets have doubled since 1950.

"You drop a fishing line in the open ocean, and often it's sharks that are there first — whether or not they're the primary target," said Sandin, who works at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Scientists have known for decades that individual shark species are declining, but a new study draw-



This 2001 photo provided by Dr. Greg Skomal shows a shortfin mako shark off the coast of Massachusetts.

ing on 57 global datasets underscores just how dramatically worldwide populations have collapsed in the past half century.

Globally, the abundance of oceanic sharks and rays dropped more than 70% between 1970 and 2018, according to a study published Wednesday in the journal Nature.

And 24 of the 31 species of sharks and rays are threatened with extinction, while three species — oceanic whitetip sharks, scalloped hammerhead sharks and great hammerhead sharks — are considered critically endangered.

"The last 50 years have

been pretty devastating for global shark populations," said Nathan Pacoureau, a biologist at Simon Fraser University in Canada and a co-author of the study.

Sometimes sharks are intentionally caught by fishing fleets, but more often they are reeled in incidentally as "bycatch," in the course of fishing for other species

such as tuna and swordfish. Sharks and rays are both fish with skeletons made of cartilage, not bone. In contrast to most other kinds of fish, they generally take several years to reach sexual maturity, and they produce fewer offspring.

"In terms of timing, they reproduce more like mammals — and that makes them

especially vulnerable," said Pacoureau. "Their populations cannot replenish as quickly as many other kinds of fish." The number of fishing vessels trolling the open ocean has risen steeply since the 1950s, as engine power expanded ships' range. And while climate change and pollution also imperil shark survival, increased fishing pressure is the greatest threat for every oceanic shark species.

"When you remove top predators of the ocean, it impacts every part of the marine food web," said Stuart Pimm, an ecologist at Duke University, who was not involved in the study. "Sharks are like the lions, tigers and bears of the ocean world, and they help keep the rest of the ecosystem in balance." □

Associated Press

Can COVID-19 vaccines be mixed and matched?

By The Associated Press

Can COVID-19 vaccines be mixed and matched? Health officials say both doses should be of the same kind.

The COVID-19 vaccines rolling out in the United States, the United Kingdom and other parts of the world so far require two shots given a few weeks apart.

In the U.S. where vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna are being distributed, health officials say the two aren't interchangeable even though they're made similarly.

In "exceptional situations" when the same kind isn't available or if it's not known what was given for the first shot, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in recently updated guidance that it's OK to give whichever vaccine is available for the second shot.

The agency noted that the recommendations could be updated as more information becomes available, or if other types of vaccines are authorized for distribution.



A pharmacist holds a vial of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, left, alongside the a vial of saline solution it will be mixed with at a vaccination site at the Corsi Houses, Friday, Jan. 15, 2021, in the East Harlem neighborhood of New York.

Associated Press

The CDC also said the doses could be given up to six weeks apart if it's not possible to give the second dose at the recommended interval.

For the Pfizer vaccine, the second dose is recommended three weeks after the first. The second shot of the Moderna vaccine is supposed to be four weeks later.

"After posting our initial guidance, we received feedback that some flexibility in our language might be helpful," CDC spokeswoman Kristen Nor-

dlund said in an email. The original recommendations on doses and timing should still be followed, but the agency didn't want its guidance "to be so rigid that it creates unintended barriers," Nordlund said.

Officials in England, where shots by Pfizer and a different type of vaccine by AstraZeneca are available, also say the doses should be consistent.

But in rare cases, they say a mismatched dose is better than partial protection. □

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

4					8			3
	9		6	3		2	5	
	1							
1			9		4		8	
	4						3	
	7		3		5			1
							7	
	3	6		5	2		9	
2			8					6

Difficulty Level ★★★

1/28

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In ‘Palmer,’ Timberlake embraces stillness of a broken man

By BROOKE LEFFERTS
Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Justin Timberlake turns 40 this week and seemingly has the energy of a teenager, recently performing a new song for the inauguration celebration, welcoming a second son with wife Jessica Biel and starring in the new Apple TV+ film, “Palmer.”

Timberlake plays Eddie Palmer, a former high-school football star whose bad decisions land him in prison, with few options when he gets out. When he returns to his grandmother’s house in a small Southern town to try to build a life, he meets Sam, the charismatic 8-year-old boy next door who’s bullied for sometimes dressing like a girl and enjoying dolls and tea parties. When Sam’s mother leaves town, Palmer reluctantly steps in to care for the boy. Timberlake’s had star turns in films like “Friends with Benefits” and “Inside Llewyn Davis,” but “Palmer” marks his time as a solo film headliner. Since childhood, he’s mostly been known for his singing and dancing. “Palmer” called for Timberlake to tone down his exuberance and play an intense, quiet, broken man living in a town where everyone knows his story. “Twelve years in prison I think will make you a little



This image released by Apple shows Justin Timberlake, left, and Ryder Allen in a scene from “Palmer.”

Associated Press

numb... we’ve seen stories about the trauma of incarceration and so that played a part in how I wanted to portray this character,” Timberlake said in a recent interview. “My idols are Newman and Brando and Dean ... actors that were able to contain and almost struggle with releasing their emotion. More specific to Eddie, I think that that’s that type of guy, and I knew those type of guys growing up, and you know, my grandfather was that type of guy ... just grew up in a different generation,” Timberlake said. Director Fisher Stevens said he and Timberlake talked a lot about “stillness and trusting” while shooting the film. “Because I’m an actor, there is a certain instinct to

do, to perform. So we had to fight against that and we did it together. And I think he really started to enjoy it, frankly,” Stevens said. “But I don’t think it was organic to him. I think it’s a testament to his abilities as an actor.” Timberlake’s energy impressed Stevens, who noted the star rehearsed on nights and weekends. “He’s kind of a remarkable person, if you think about the fact that he has been famous for so long, has made it in many different (areas) music, dance, acting ... you know, when he got to the set every day, he was a grip, he was a gaffer, he was one of us, man. He was everybody. And he never left the set,” Stevens said. “He was friendly with everybody. And I was kind

of like, ‘Wow, how is this guy so well adjusted?’” Timberlake’s 8-year-old co-star, newcomer Ryder Allen, said he learned a lot from watching Timberlake transform from fun guy on set to a somber Eddie in their scenes together. “In the first scene, it was really shocking to me because the way he just went from that is just pure, pure acting. I was amazed by it.” Timberlake and Allen bonded over weeks of rehearsals, and their affinity shows on screen, particularly when Palmer begins to show authentic parenting instincts, carefully giving Sam advice and throwing him a birthday party. “I said, whoever the kid is that we find, he has to be able to improv with me, be-

cause I think that’s where we’re going to find those little gems and those nuances to where you really kind of feel like you’re just watching people try to figure it out instead of ... feeling like you’re watching a movie.” Timberlake appreciated the film’s examination of masculinity. Palmer was raised with a more “stereotypical idea” of what it means to be a man and has to expand his mindset. “That an 8-year-old boy can completely change that and heighten the perspective of a man like that. And in turn, that’s the thing that gives him meaning. That’s the thing that gives him self-worth. That journey was really important to me.” “We all have these labels. Right? And this movie, we started the conversation. It shatters labels. And that’s kind of why I wanted to make the film,” Stevens said. “I think everyone will enjoy this movie. Everyone will be moved by this film. And it doesn’t matter where you live. It doesn’t matter who you voted for. It doesn’t matter what you believe ... because it’s about human emotions of human beings that are both just trying to make it, and they find each other and they give each other so much.” □

Cannes Film Festival, canceled in 2020, is postponed to July



A scooter drives by the Palais des Festivals at the 71st international film festival, Cannes, southern France, on May 7, 2018.

Associated Press

By JAKE COYLE
AP Film Writer
NEW YORK (AP) — The Cannes Film Festival, can-

celed altogether last year by the pandemic, is postponing this year’s edition from May to July in hopes

of having an in-person festival. Cannes organizers announced Wednesday that this year’s festival will now take place July 6-17, about two months after its typical period. The French Riviera festival, which had run for nearly 75 years with few interruptions, is currently hoping the coronavirus recedes enough by summertime. Cannes last year first looked at a postponement its 73rd festival to June or July before ultimately canceling altogether. The festival still went ahead with a selection announcement to celebrate the films it had

planned to include in its prestigious lineup. This year, organizers are intent on having a festival, one way or another. No details were announced Wednesday on what shape a 2021 edition might take. If Cannes were to go forward with attendees in theaters in July, it would be the first major film festival to do so since the Venice Film Festival mounted a festival in September, with masked moviegoers and social distancing on red carpets. On Thursday, the premier independent film festival, Sundance, launches with virtual screenings and drive-in events scattered around

the U.S. The Berlin Film Festival, scheduled for March in Germany, is planning a virtual event. During the pandemic, Cannes’ central hub, the Palais des Festivals, has been used for hospital beds and, more recently, as a vaccination center. □

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Difficulty Level ★★

1/28

Could more Hall of Fame shutouts be on the horizon?

By **NOAH TRISTER**
AP Baseball Writer

It could be a while before the Baseball Writers' Association of America votes anyone new into the Hall of Fame.

BBWAA members delivered an empty class in this year's election, which was announced Tuesday night. Curt Schilling received the most support, but the former pitcher was selected on 71.1% of the ballots, falling 16 votes short of the 75% needed for induction. Barry Bonds (61.8%) and Roger Clemens (61.6%) were the next-highest finishers. It was the first time since 2013 that the BBWAA didn't elect anyone. That year proved to be an exception. The writers elected 22 players from 2014-20. But there are signs that the 2021 shut-out could be repeated next year — and perhaps the year after that as well. Schilling came up short, his numbers barely budging from last year. He's turned off voters with his behavior in recent years, including social media posts about Muslim extremists, transgender people and journalists. Schilling wrote on Facebook that he has asked the Hall of Fame to remove his name from next year's ballot. Hall of Fame Board Chairman Jane Forbes Clark said in a statement the board "will consider the request at our next meeting."

The BBWAA responded Wednesday and said "Schilling's request to remove himself from the ballot is a violation of the rules set forth by the National Baseball Hall of Fame's board of directors" are urged the board to reject the request. The BBWAA said Schilling "should remain on the ballot for consideration by the voting body for what would be his final year on the BBWAA ballot in 2022."

Next year's ballot is expected to include Alex Rodriguez and David Ortiz for the first time. Rodriguez was suspended for the 2014 season for violating Major League Baseball's



In this May 28, 1996, file photo, Boston Red Sox's Roger Clemens releases a pitch against the Oakland Athletics during a baseball game in Oakland, Calif., Coliseum.

Associated Press

PED policy and collective bargaining agreement. The New York Times reported in 2009 that Ortiz was among those who tested positive in a 2003 survey designed to determine the degree of steroids use in baseball.

Barring a significant change in the way the electorate approaches PEDs, it's possible the BBWAA won't vote anyone in next year, either. And the same could be true for 2023, when Carlos Beltrán — implicated in the Houston Astros' sign-stealing scandal — appears likely to be the top newcomer on the ballot.

LAST CHANCE

Bonds and Clemens have one more year on the writers' ballot, and Schilling does, too, unless the Hall

abides by his request for removal. There was a time when Bonds and Clemens seemed to be making progress as new voters were added to the process, but now they're heading into their 10th and final chance.

"The turnover in the electorate seems to be good for a point or two every year, but they need, what, 13 or 14 points now?" said Ryan Thibodaux, whose on-line ballot tracker provides a running poll in the weeks leading up to the vote announcement. "They need to change a whole bunch of minds. It's basically if a bunch of people have decided that they're waiting until year 10 to make that switch, that's pretty much their hope." □

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Super matchup between QBs Mahomes, Brady for NFL title

By JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer

There has never been a Super Bowl matchup of accomplished quarterbacks quite like the one coming up next week between Tampa Bay's Tom Brady and Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes.

This will be the sixth Super Bowl matchup between former AP NFL MVPs, the second between former Super Bowl MVP winning quarterbacks and the first between players who had previously won both awards.

Brady has won a record six Super Bowl titles, four Super MVPs and three league MVP awards since becoming starter in New England in 2001.

Mahomes is just getting started in his career and already has one league MVP and one Super Bowl MVP to his credit and is back in the title game for the second time.

The first Super Bowl matchup of former league MVPs came in the 1976 season when Oakland's Ken Stabler (1974 winner) beat Minnesota's Fran Tarkenton (1975 winner).

Denver's John Elway was part of the next two MVP matchups, losing to San Francisco's Joe Montana after the 1989 season and



Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Tom Brady reacts after winning the NFC championship NFL football game against the Green Bay Packers in Green Bay, Wis., Sunday, Jan. 24, 2021.

Associated Press

beating Green Bay's Brett Favre eight years later.

Then it happened again in back-to-back seasons in 2015-16 with Denver's Peyton Manning besting Carolina's Cam Newton and Brady beating Atlanta's Matt Ryan.

Brady was also part of the only previous matchup of Super Bowl MVPs losing a rematch to Eli Manning and the New York Giants following the 2011 season. This will also be the second time in NFL history that the past two championship

quarterbacks are facing off in the title game. The only other time it happened came in 1943 when Washington's Sammy Baugh faced Chicago's Sid Luckman. Baugh had won the title with Washington in 1942 and Luckman with the Bears in 1941.

Brady is also the fourth quarterback to start Super Bowls for two franchises, joining Peyton Manning (Indianapolis and Denver), Kurt Warner (Rams and Arizona) and Craig Morton (Dallas and Denver).

CELEBRATE AT HOME: The Bucs will be the first team to play the Super Bowl at their home stadium, although two others got to play for the title in their home markets.

In the 1979 season, the Los Angeles Rams went to the Super Bowl against Pittsburgh at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, where they lost 31-19 to the Steelers.

Five years later, the San Francisco 49ers won the title just a few miles south of their home at Candlestick

Park with a 38-16 win over the Miami Dolphins at Stanford Stadium.

With a win Feb. 7, the Bucs will be the first team in the NFL, NBA, NHL or Major League Baseball to win it all at its home venue since the Golden State Warriors did it in the 2017 NBA Finals against Cleveland. Every title since then was clinched on the road or in a neutral site at the Super Bowl or in a coronavirus bubble.

The last time the NFL champion finished the season by winning a title at its own stadium came in the 1965 season when Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers beat the Cleveland Browns 23-12 at Lambeau Field in the final season before the Super Bowl.

GOING WILD: Tampa Bay was the first team in 10 years to make it to the Super Bowl despite not winning the division.

The Bucs are hoping to follow the path the Green Bay Packers took in the 2010 season when they finished second in the NFC North but went on to win the Super Bowl against Pittsburgh. The Packers were the sixth wild-card team to win it all, joining the Oakland Raiders (1980 season), Denver (1997), Baltimore (2000), Pittsburgh (2005) and the New York Giants (2007). □

NFL picks 3 honorary captains, Amanda Gorman for coin toss



American poet Amanda Gorman reads a poem during the 59th Presidential Inauguration at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL has selected three people

as honorary captains for the Super Bowl along with inaugural poet Amanda Gorman for an original poem.

Commissioner Roger Goodell announced Wednesday that educator Trimaime Davis, nurse manager Suzie Dorner and Marine veteran James Martin will take part in the coin toss on Feb. 7 in Tampa, Florida. The trio was picked for embodying the NFL's message of "It Takes All of Us" this season.

Gorman, the country's first National Youth Poet Laureate, recited "The Hill We Climb" at the Biden inauguration Jan. 20.

She will recite her poem

about the trio's impact before the game, which will be televised and shown inside Raymond James Stadium.

Davis made sure to get his students and their families in Los Angeles devices and internet access, and he also hosted tech workshops to help people learn how to use the devices.

Dorner, who lost two grandparents to COVID-19, is the COVID ICU nurse manager at Tampa General Hospital and represents healthcare workers across the country as honorary captain.

Martin helped veterans, high school athletes and local youth connect virtu-

ally through the Wounded Warrior Project and by livestreaming events in Pittsburgh. He volunteered to livestream every home football game for Aliquippa High School so families could watch. He also has taken in needy children in his neighborhood.

"During this incredibly challenging time in our lives, Trimaime, Suzie, and James have exemplified the essence of leadership, each in their own way," Goodell said.

"We are grateful for their commitment and proud to share their stories and recognize them during this special moment on Super Bowl Sunday." □